DARK HORSE 20 YEARS
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
111
$2.99 US
SHORTCUT 5 OF 5
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE
OF THE IMMORTAL
DIRECT SALES

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by DANA LEWIS
lettering and retouch by TOMOKO SAITO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin* vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN
Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Itō-*ryū*

HABAKI KAGIMURA
Powerful *bangashira*, serving the Shogun and seeking the secret of immortality

BURANDO
Deranged medical examiner saved from prison by Kagimura

DEWANOSUKE
Manji's celimate a simple man imprisoned for theft and arson

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Manji meets the deceptive Kagimura at a *bakufu* stronghold near Edo Castle, where Manji is ambushed, overwhelmed, and captured. Kagimura assigns two medical examiners, Mōzen and Burando, the task of discovering the secrets of the *kessen-chu*, using Manji's body as their shortcut to immortality. After Manji's plan to escape fails, Burando puts his own twisted scheme in motion . . .

designer DEBRA BAILEY editorial intern MATT PYON
editor PHILIP SIMON publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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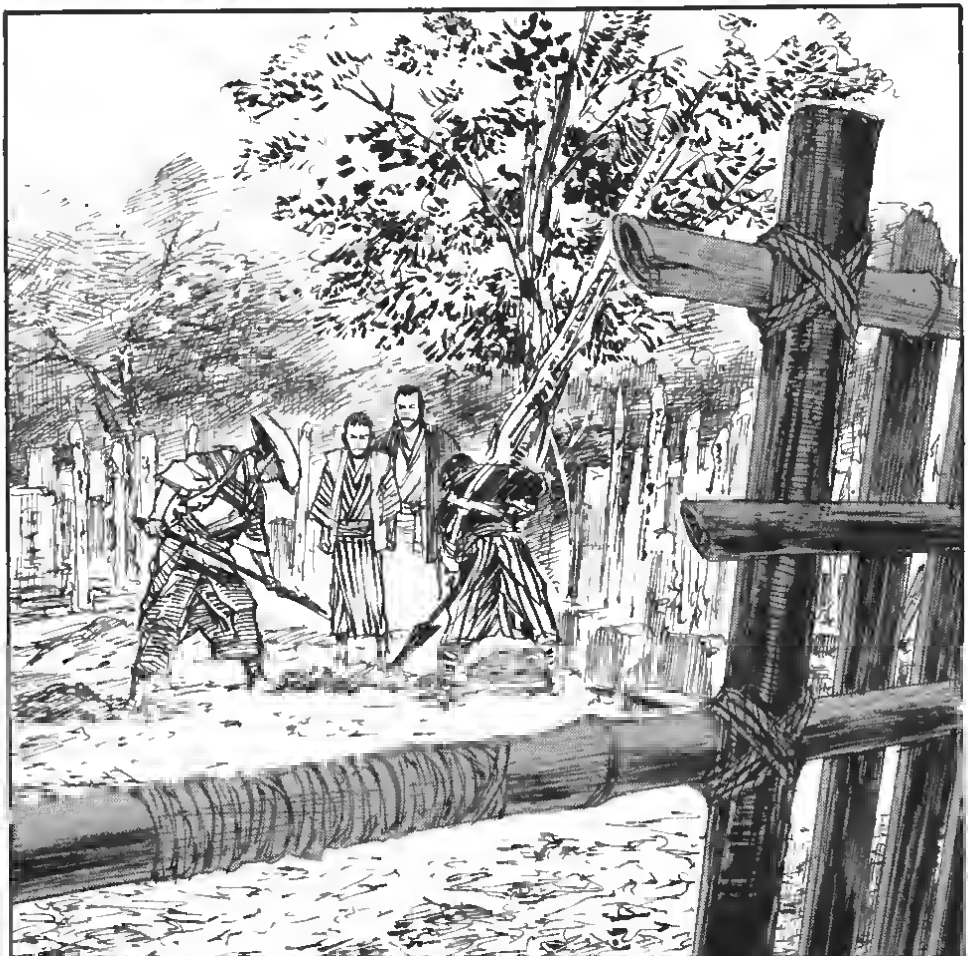
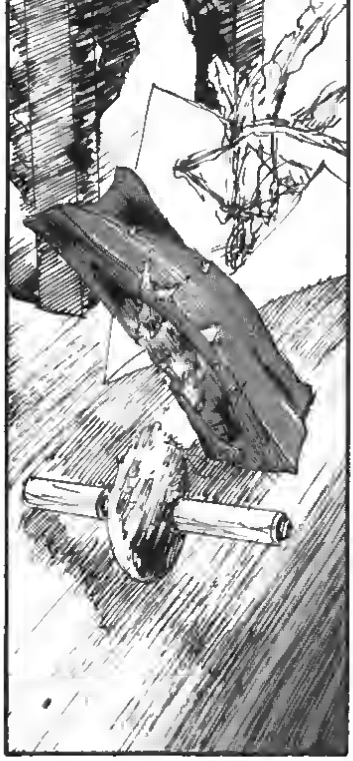
無限の住人

SHORTCUT

-part five-

YOU BID MOTHER FAREWELL, JIRŌYA?

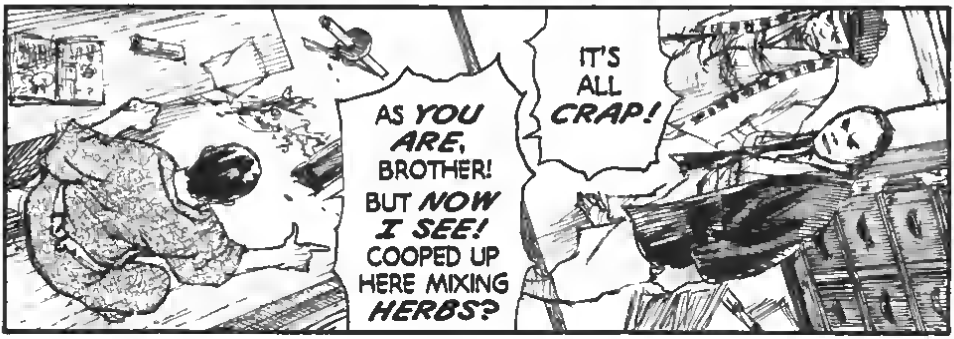




JIRŌYA! WHAT THE DEVIL?!

GOTŌ-SENSEI, I... I'VE BEEN...
...STUDY-ING WITH YOU...

...BECAUSE YOU'RE AN OMEMIE HŌIN.


AS YOU ARE, BROTHER! BUT NOW I SEE! COOPED UP HERE MIXING HERBS?
IT'S ALL CRAP!

HRRGG... WHAT A FARCE!

THE INFLU-ENZA TWO YEARS AGO? WE DID NO-THING!
WE JUST WATCHED OUR FRIENDS AND COL-LEAGUES DIE.

OHH...! OSAKI-DONO!

AND NOW... OUR MOTHER!
ARE WE JUST SUPPOSED TO TREAT COLIC AND BERIBERI?! NO!
YOU KNOW IT, BROTHER! THAT HŌSŌ-SAI...
...THE TOWN-FOLK HOLD WHEN PEOPLE DIE...?
THAT'S ALL OUR MEDI-CINE IS!
SPELLS! RITES!! MAKING DISEASE WORSE!
IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY, MOM AND OSAKI WOULD BE ALIVE!
OUR PEOPLE ARE FOOLS! OUR DOCTORS, FAKES!
SHAME! SHOW SOME SHAME!
JIRŌ-YA!
SPAK!
;hff!
GUAH! HAHAH!!
....
....
....

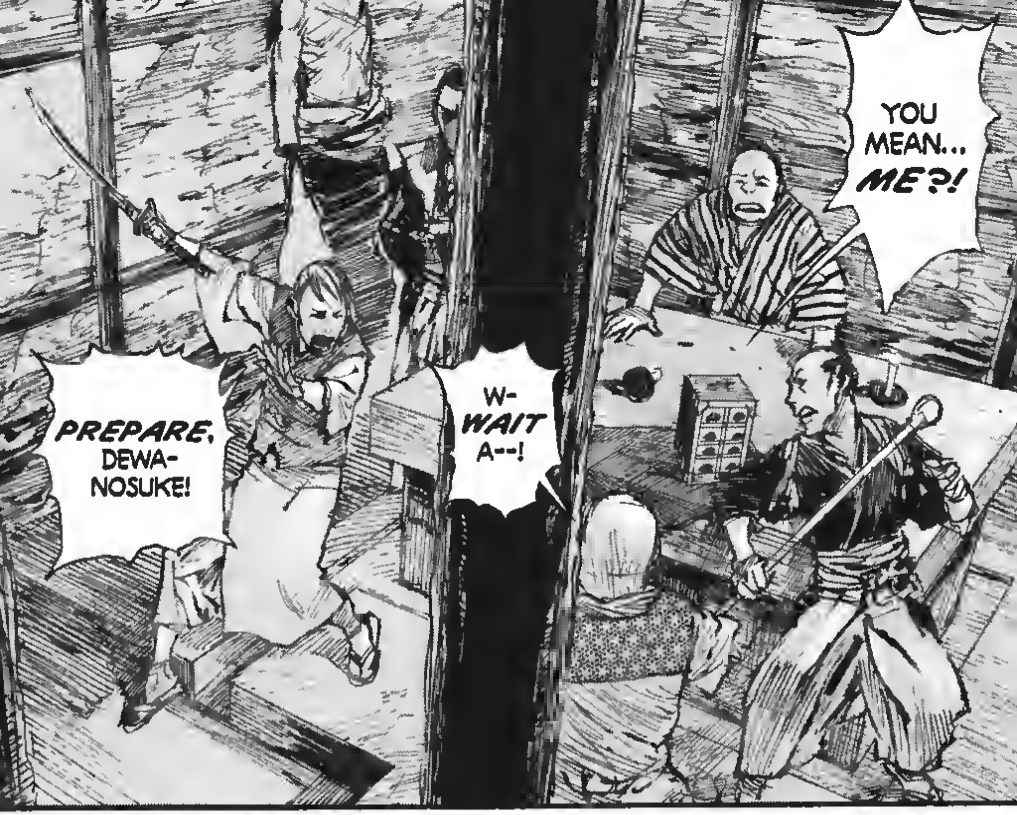
WHAT'S UP?
STOW-AWAY.
SWAM OUT WHEN WE LIFTED ANCHOR.
WE'LL HAVE TO TURN BACK.
BUT SIR, THEY'LL REVOKE OUR PERMIT...
IF YOU... TAKE ME... BACK...
I WILL... CUT OUT MY GUTS! RIGHT HERE!

BURAN-
DO!
SNAP
TO
IT,
MAN!
YOU
HESI-
TATE?
NOW?!
DO
IT!!

BOSS...
.....
.....
.....
...I'LL DO IT.

I'M NOT LIKE GŌTŌ OR MY BROTHER.
I'M NOT LIKE MŌZEN-DONO.
AYAME BURANDO IS NO JAPANESE DOCTOR!
HE ABANDONS JAPAN! TO WALK IN RAN!
KIAI!

KIIIYAAA!!
EH?
SHWAH!
--THE HELL?!
WHAT--


YOU MEAN... ME?!
W- WAIT A--!
PREPARE, DEWA-NOSUKE!

HAHA!

EEK!

THIS... AIN'T FUNNY!

YOU CALL THIS SURGERY?
I AIN'T GONNA DIE BEFORE I'M IMMORTAL!
THAPP
YES!
GO FOR IT, DEWA-NOSUKE.
HABAKI'S STILL WAY...
...OVER HERE...

SHAK!
AARGG
OHHH... IT HURTS...
.....
.....
.....
HUH?

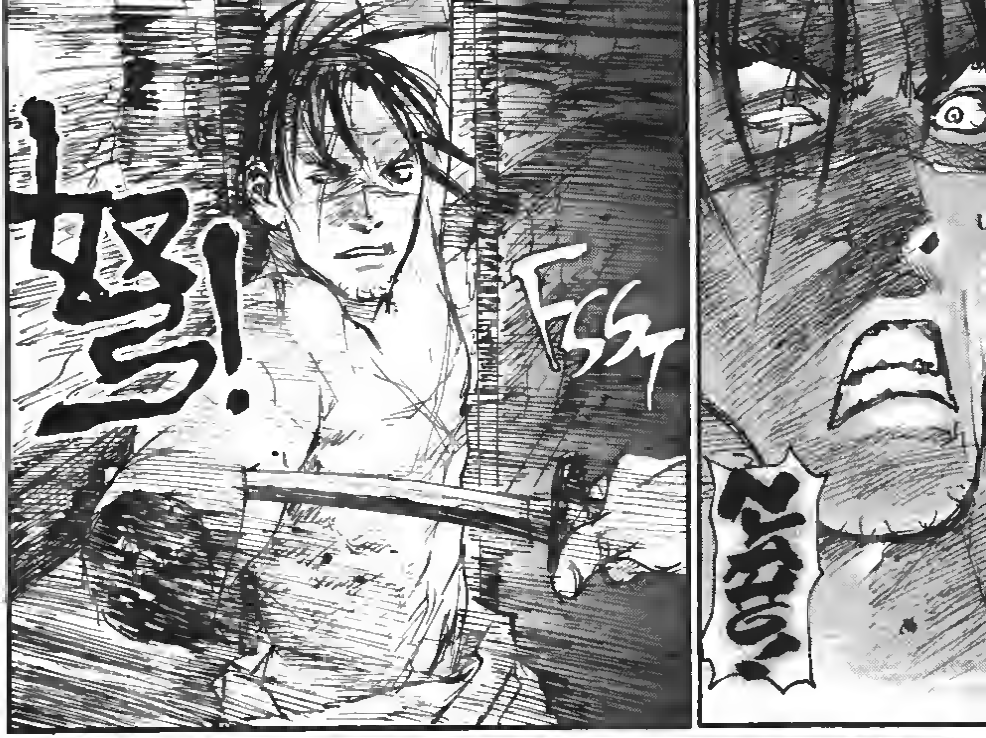
AIN'T THAT... THAT... MINE ?!
BURAN-DO!!
Y-YES, SIR.
GET READY !
NO MORE SWORD-PLAY!
YES, SIR!

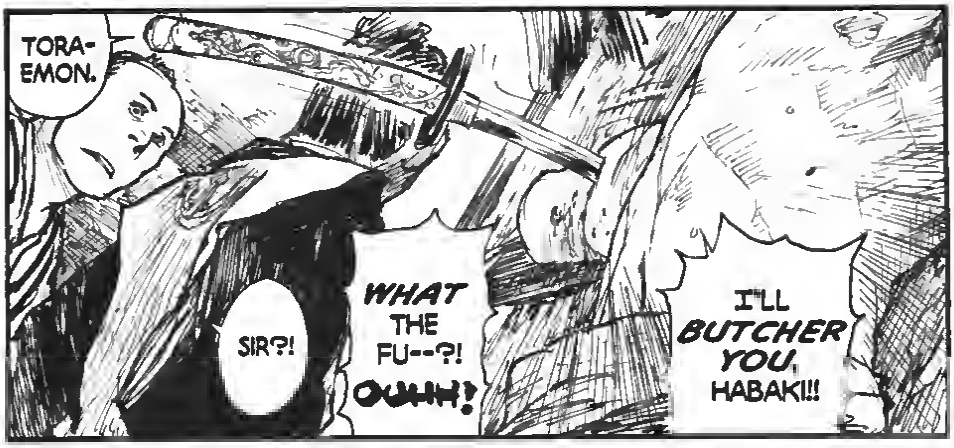
TORA-EMON!
MANJI'S RIGHT HAND! BRING IT HERE!
AUGH!
AUUK! UURRK!
EH... UH, YES-SIR.
ECHH...
GUSSH
IT'S HURTIN' MORE AN' MORE!
DON'T SQUIRM!
DOC! DOC!!

UH... SIR?
NOW GET THE COAGU-LANT.
KYEOWW! IT HURTS !!
DON'T CRY, YOU IDIOT!
WHOA.

HRMM... HE HAS DONE THIS A LOT.
HE'S FAST!
TUT. NO TIME FOR THAT.
FOLLOW, TORA-EMON.
SIR?
WITH DEWA-NOSUKE'S HAND.
.....
.....
.....
HABAKI KAGIMURA.

I NEVER THOUGHT YOU WERE *THIS* TWISTED.
WHAT DO YOU FUCKERS THINK PEOPLE *ARE*...?
...?
WHAT'RE YOU--

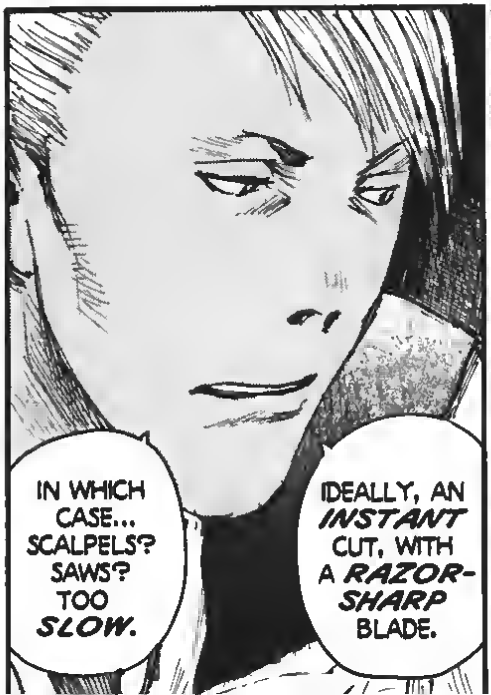

FSSH
NIAO!

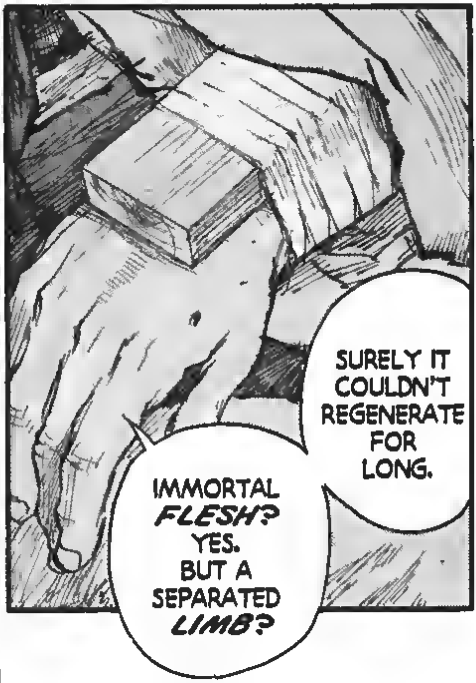

TORA-EMON.
SIR?!
WHAT THE FU--?!
OUHH!
I'LL BUTCHER YOU, HABAKI!!

MATCH THE TWO ENDS.
HOLD THEM... LIKE THIS...
...UNTIL THEY TAKE.

HOW IS HE?
HE'S FAINTED.

I SAW THAT THE ANES-THESIA WEAKENED THE REGENERATIVE POWERS...
...SO I HAD TO DO WITHOUT IT.
EVER SINCE I SAW MANJI BEGIN TO ABSORB MŌZEN-DONO'S ARM...
...I'VE WANTED TO TEST THIS.


IN WHICH CASE... SCALPELS? SAWS? TOO SLOW.
IDEALLY, AN INSTANT CUT, WITH A RAZOR-SHARP BLADE.

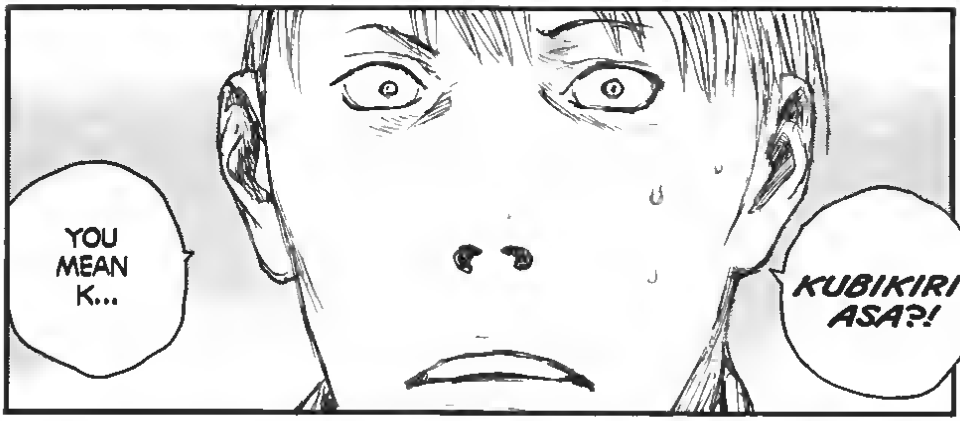

SURELY IT COULDN'T REGENERATE FOR LONG.
IMMORTAL FLESH? YES. BUT A SEPARATED LIMB?

FROM THE DAY MŌZEN-DONO AND I TOOK ON THIS TASK... IT WAS YOUR REQUEST, HABAKI-DONO, THAT WE EXPLAIN HOW IMMORTALITY WORKED...
...AND THEN IMPART IT TO THIS FELON.
EX-PLAIN THIS BODY...?
BUT THAT SURGERY SHOWED ME.
THAT SHOULD BE MY LIFE'S WORK. FORGIVE MY INPUDENCE.
EVEN WITH ALL THE TOOLS, MEDICINES, AND BOOKS IN JAPAN... IT WOULD TAKE UNTIL HELL FROZE OVER.
SO INSTEAD OF WASTING TIME, JUST TRANSFER THE DAMN IMMOR-TALITY.
FORGIVEN. WE, TOO...
...WANT THAT ABOVE ALL. IN ALL HASTE.
AND SO?
THE RESULTS SO FAR?

TOO SOON TO SAY. EVEN WITH THE LIMB ATTACHED...
...DEWANOSUKE WILL WEAKEN.
AFTER ALL, HIS FLESH IS BEING *RE-MADE*.
THESE NEXT DAYS ARE CRITICAL.
FOOD, OF COURSE, BUT *EVEN MORE*...
...HE NEEDS *REST*. *DECENT* REST.
HRM. KARUKOZAWA!
YES, *SIR*?
HAVE TATEWAKI CLEAR THE *AGARI-ZASHIKI*.
HE'LL HAVE *THREE MAIDS*, IN SHIFTS.
AND *ALSO*, HABAKI-*DONO*, IT SHAMES ME TO ASK...

WHAT NOW?
I REALIZED THIS AFTER YOU AIDED US, SIR.
IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN OBVIOUS, BUT...
...WE NEED TO SEVER THE BODIES IN THE EXACT SAME PLACE.
CAN YOU SEND US HELP?
HMM... VERY WELL.
HUMILIATING, BUT... WITH MY SWORD SKILLS...?

I'LL GET YOU YAMADA ASAEMON.


YOU MEAN K...
KUBIKIRI ASA?!

INDEX FINGER, MIDDLE FINGER, SAME LENGTH...
I'VE HEARD THAT PICKPOCKETS *PRIZE* GUYS LIKE THIS.
DEWA-NOSUKE IF YOU MAKE IT BACK ALIVE...
...YOU'LL BE ONE *MONSTER THIEF*...

IS DŌA... ALREADY ASLEEP?
D-DŌA ALWAYS SLEEPS AFTER EATIN'.

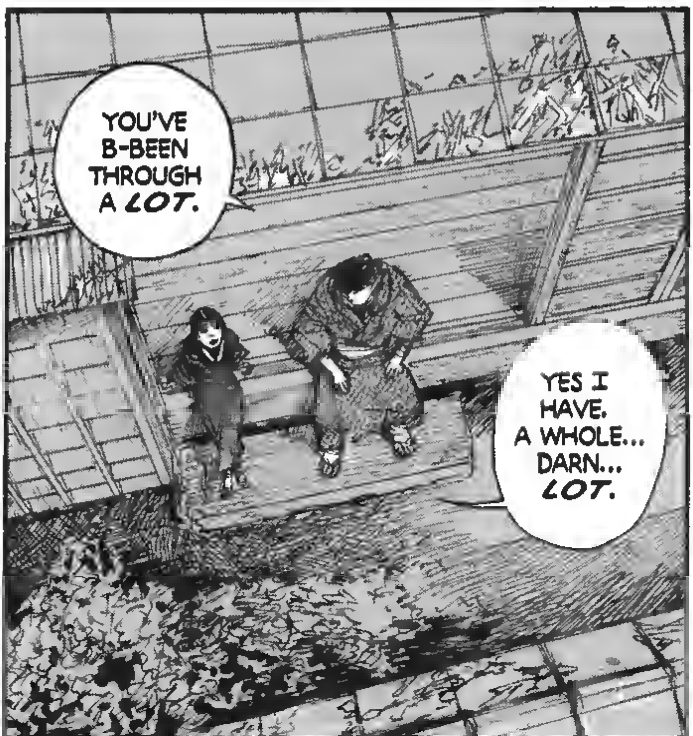
BUT NOT YOU, ISAKU?
NOPE. NOT ME.

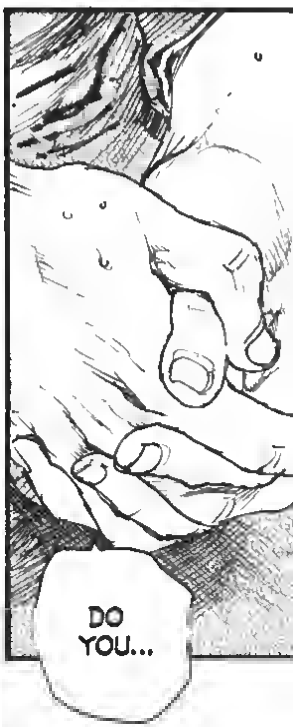
UHMM...

OH. IT'S OKAY. *REALLY.* I SEEM TO BE USED TO IT NOW.
...AN' ME WITH HER....
I'M *SORRY*... ALL THIS *STUFF*...
I DON'T MIND THINGS BEING... COLOR-FUL.
I STILL HAVE MY HOUSE.
ONLY, IT'S A BIT *TOO* AIRY, MAYBE...?
R-RIN-*SAN*? YOU G-GREW UP HERE?
THAT I DID.
YOUR PAR-ENTS...?
KILLED, BOTH OF THEM.

K-
K-
KILLED...
?!
EH?
AHH!!
I'M
SORRY!
SHOULD I HAVE SAID "DIED"..?

IT BRINGS IT BACK...
ONLY, THERE WAS MOON-LIGHT, JUST LIKE NOW.


YOU'VE B-BEEN THROUGH A LOT.
YES I HAVE. A WHOLE... DARN... LOT.


DO YOU...

...KILLED 'EM?
...KNOW NOW?
WHO...? WHO...

PARDON?

OH... YOU'VE HEARD THAT NAME?
ANOTSU KAGEHISA.
TO BE CONTINUED...!

NEXT MONTH:
ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY, Part 1 of 6

Yamada Asaemon, the Shogun's executioner and sword tester, arrives at Burando's request! Known as Kubikiri Asa, the legend of this historical figure is explored in Dark Horse's *Samurai Executioner* series, and his presence will certainly be felt in *Blade of the Immortal*! Medical examiner Burando wants to transfer Manji's limbs to other hosts, and he hopes that Asaemon's deadly, precise skills can quicken the pace! Hiroaki Samura's wild samurai ride takes a darker turn, as his horrific "On the Perfection of Anatomy" story arc begins! This issue also sports a beautiful wraparound Rin cover painted by Samura.

Send letters and fan art to
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All fan artwork, letters, and e-mails submitted become the property of Dark Horse Comics.

GLOSSARY

Agari-zashiki: In this context, a special cell for imprisoning high-ranking soldiers.

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*.

Banshū: Officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself.

Beriberi: Painful vitamin deficiency disease which can cause limb paralysis.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Dono: Archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of higher rank.

Edo: Capitol of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Hōsō-sai: Smallpox rites. Townspeople began to worship the "god of smallpox" and prayed for relief as smallpox spread in Japan.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Jirōya: Ayame Burando's name before he left Japan to study medicine in other countries.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Omemie-Hōin: A doctor allowed to treat the Shogun.

Osaki: A girl's name. Osaki was apparently young Jirōya's crush who died in an epidemic.

Ran: The middle part of "Burando," *Ran* is derived from the "ran" in *Orando*, the Japanese pronunciation of Holland. The Dutch were the only Western country allowed to trade with Japan through the tightly guarded port of Dejima in Nagasaki. Rangaku (Dutch studies) became synonymous with the study of Western knowledge. Burando changed his name after he stowed away and traveled through Europe.

Ryū: A sword school.

Yamada Asaemon: Nicknamed *Kubikiri Asa*, the Shogun's executioner was a master swordsman, sword tester, and an expert at beheading and cutting human bodies.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

HORSEPOWER

DARK HORSE
CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

What is past is prologue . . . Twenty years ago, Dark Horse Comics got its start in the backroom of a small comics shop, two idealistic young men pasting together, by hand, the first issue of what would become one of the most celebrated anthologies in comics history. But to today's average reader, that's ancient history. What's it got to with the comics you're reading now? Maybe not very much at all. But the philosophy that was behind Dark Horse's beginnings has everything to do with the books we publish today.

The eighties were an exciting time for comics. The direct market (the distribution of comics to a growing number of comics specialty shops) was booming, lots of new publishers were launching new titles, and a multitude of new creators—as well as the established old guard of comics writers and artists—were finding outlets for material that probably would not have been seen a few years earlier. And all of these new comics helped to create a new niche market: the comics reader.

The reader was typically (but not always) a little older, with maturing tastes and wider areas of interest, who desired something beyond the juvenile power fantasies that were the focus of most mainstream comics. The reader put lie to the conventional comics wisdom that said readers stayed with comics a mere three years before moving on to other interests. The reader, bless him (and her!), viewed comics as a storytelling medium—not just a genre vehicle. And the readers, by the very fact of their existence, helped to birth Dark Horse Comics. See, Mike Richardson and I were readers. The writers and artists who produced Dark Horse's very first titles were readers. As readers, we all wanted to give our readers something a reader would like—no matter what genre the story.

Two decades have passed and we still hold to that publishing philosophy. The market has taken some hits, and the speculators who fueled the boom in the early nineties are long gone, but the readers are still here. Some of you have told us that Dark Horse is the reason you're still reading comics lo these many years later. Others of you who have come along since have told us that Dark Horse was the reason you started reading comics in the first place. But whether you've been with us since day one, or just picked up your first Dark Horse comic; whether you're a fan of horror comics or science fiction; whether you want the latest in cutting-edge American comics or the finest manga; or whether you like action-adventure or humor, you're our target audience. You always have been, and you always will be.

If, as Shakespeare said, "what is past is prologue," consider the books we've produced during our first twenty years as a preview of the kind of things you can expect in the next twenty (and beyond). We're just getting started!

—Randy Stradley

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JAN/FEB 2006

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